

4/8/13

Strategic Message Development Project

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Purpose

The following is a result of discussions held at previous Groundswell meetings during which members of Groundswell renewed their commitment to the goal of "maximizing message synchronization". It is submitted for further discussion, and approval, at this week's (April 10th) Groundswell meeting.

The purpose of this project is to improve the message development goals of Groundswell:

1. To achieve the stated goal of Groundswell to: "Maximize message synchronization".
2. To develop a strategic thematic message to be used by all Groundswell members to maximize the impact of each organization's vision, mission, projects, and issues.
3. To allow for the greatest flexibility for each member organization to incorporate the theme with their individual issues.
4. To integrate each organization's message into a larger thematic strategic message, making the whole greater than the parts. This will enable "messages" to be "synchronized" to a greater strategic theme or vision in order to be "maximized"...the stated goal of Groundswell.

Strategic Message

What is needed is an umbrella thematic message under which each specific issue can be magnified and maximized. For those familiar with it, this is an extension and development of the Leesburg Grid (which the Left has co-opted and now uses extensively, and the Right has ignored and allowed to fall into disuse).

1. Fail. Failed. Failure.
 - Obama's policies have failed. We've tried it his way during his first two years...it was a disaster. The American people spoke loud and clear about that in 2010.
 - Liberal policies fail. We should not be solely focused on Obama. The battle is larger than that. At every opportunity, we should declare (and explain how and why) liberal policies fail those they are intended to help, as well as all Americans.
 - Examples of Obama/liberal failures are numerous. Actual examples are the meat on the bones. It is important to give examples to make the thematic message come alive.

2. Obama/Liberal policies make things worse. Things are worse now than when Obama took office/became President. The policies he pursues...His vision for America...make problems worse.
 - This is an extension (almost a subtheme...1(b) so to speak...of the failure theme, but an important one. This negates Obama's blame game (it's all Bush's fault).
 - There are countless examples of Obama/liberal policies making things worse. Examples are what helps a thematic message to resonate with voters.
 - The price of gas (or anything).
 - The number of people on food stamps/welfare/disability.
 - The number of unemployed. The unemployment rate.
 - The deficit. The debt.
3. Lack of leadership.
 - We are in this situation because of a complete lack of leadership in the White House.
 - There has been no leadership for the past five years.
 - All we have is a blame game that divides Americans...it pits one group of Americans against another. It is not leadership (which would unite us)...it is partisanship (which seeks to divide us).
4. Putting politics ahead of people/our country/America. Obama continues to play politics.
 - The fourth theme is an extension/subtheme...3(b)...of the lack of leadership theme.
 - We (the Right) have done the best job with this theme. It is why Obama's favorable rating has fallen and why he is now engaged in his cynical (and political) "charm offensive".
 - We need to continue to drive this message ("Stop putting politics ahead of the American people. Open the White House to tours!").
 - We need a President, not a candidate.
 - We don't need courtship, we need leadership.

The above four themes are best used sequentially, rather than randomly/haphazardly/isolated. Failed policies...made things worse...lack of leadership...playing politics. But if the situation does not allow for all four in order, then one is better than none. They can also be combined...the most potent might be "failed leadership" or "a failure of leadership". The most important thing is to think thematically and drive these messages.

FLEXIBILITY

One strength of this strategic messaging is the flexibility to allow each coalition member to be as strong as they wish to be within the messages above. For example, how to characterize the "failure" is completely up to the person making the point. "Epic failure", "disastrous failure", "the

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worst failure ever"...the strength (or moderation) of the details is less important than the commitment, dedication, and uniformity of using the failure theme.

SUBSTANCE

Issues matter. Details matter. Substance matters. But theme matters more. Substance matters only as it helps to reinforce the themes.

We all lament the difficulty we have persuading Americans. After all, we have the facts, figures, and data to prove our points. Why can't we persuade? There are many tactics we can use to help persuade (telling stories, finding victims, tempering tone). But these tactics pale in comparison to the importance of providing a context...a theme...to help people organize their thoughts and opinions.

In the last election, the President's campaign slogan was "Forward". Where's the substance there? Of course, there is none. But the substance is provided, within the context of the theme, as the tactics of the campaign play out. We must learn to do the same.

BE FOR SOMETHING/NARRATIVE/STORY TELLING

It is not enough to be against the other side. It is important to be for something. There needs to be a narrative of what we are for, and the narrative should include telling stories of failures (of liberalism) and successes (of conservatism).

This point should be addressed during a Groundswell meeting in order to develop a plan that the group will work toward. This will give additional opportunities for Groundswell members to provide substance to the American people.

"Being for something" is the positive portion of message development and should be the next step to be addressed and developed. Yet it will be important to remain within the outline of the above message (Failure...making it worse...lack of leadership...partisanship) once this first portion is approved.

OBJECT OF THE STRATEGIC MESSAGE

The object of the strategic message is not only President Obama. It is also the institutions and vision of liberalism, including the government at large. It is certainly reasonable, and in some/many/most cases advisable (because he is the embodiment and spokesperson of the larger institution of the federal government and liberalism) for the focus to be on President Obama and his policies/vision/values. But the issue is certainly larger than him. That is why it is important to have a strategic thematic message that encompasses the larger issues and themes. The above strategic theme that awaits the approval of Groundswell does so.